

The Church Is Sent to Proclaim Jesus

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus is better than the Old Testament prophecies and institutions because He fulfills them.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Hebrews 1–10

Imagine traveling around the world. We land in a place in Southeast Asia where the people are bowing before gods they have created with their own hands. The gods sitting on a shelf in the corner cannot hear them, but still their makers pray. Next, we travel to Africa where a father with a sick child seeks both a missionary for prayer and a witch doctor for power. Arriving in Europe, we find the landscape littered with dying and empty church buildings, a sign of the increasing secularization in the West, including the United States, as people devote their energies to various forms of self-directed worship.

We don't have to travel far to find people worshiping and trusting in false gods. On our streets, in our workplaces, even in our own families, all around us are people who worship idols. Some live for wealth, power, or prestige; others seek the approval of false deities. Whatever the case may be, these pursuits require sacrifices but fail to fulfill our deepest longings.



What are some world religions and secular belief systems represented by people in your sphere of influence?

Group Time

Point 1: Jesus is the better revelation (Heb. 1:1-3).

¹ Long ago God spoke to the ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. ² In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. God has appointed him heir of all things and made the universe through him. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact expression of his nature, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The anonymous writer of Hebrews wrote to believers who apparently were in danger of drifting from their commitment to Christ and returning to the rituals and institutions of Judaism because they were facing persecution and trials. Therefore, the writer wanted them to know that Jesus is better than anything to which they might return. First, He reminded his hearers that while God made Himself known in many ways in the past, He now fulfilled His past messages through sending His Son. The prophets of old pointed to God, but Jesus revealed God because He is God.

Jesus' Deity: Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the _____ nature and the _____ nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. The New Testament points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses _____ that God alone possesses, how He performs works that only God performs, and how He Himself claims to be the _____ of God.

In Hebrews 1:3, the writer also introduces the theme of Jesus' sacrificial death, which is the topic of much of the Book of Hebrews. The Creator, against whom we have sinned, chose to die in our place, and it is through His shed blood that we sinners are purified. In His unique capacity, Jesus was both the priest who offered the sacrifice to atone for our sins and the sacrifice itself. How can we not praise Him and proclaim Him as the better revelation of God?



What has the Son revealed about God?

Point 2: Jesus is the better high priest (Heb. 8:1-6).

¹ Now the main point of what is being said is this: We have this kind of high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not man. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; therefore, it was necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. ⁴ Now if he were on earth, he wouldn't be a priest, since there are those offering the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵ These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain. ⁶ But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been established on better promises.

At this point in the Book of Hebrews, the author did not want his readers to miss the significance of what he wrote: We believers have a better high priest who is now seated at the right hand of the "Majesty in the heavens." There, He ministered in a **tabernacle** not made by human hands. As the writer of Hebrews often does, he again described ways in which Jesus is better than the old system. For example, Jesus, the better high **priest**, completed the task of paying the price for sin.

Christ as Priest: As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect _____ is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who _____ for us before the Father and _____ for us to remain faithful.

The writer of Hebrews also wanted his readers to know that Jesus, the better high priest, is the mediator of a better **covenant** (Heb. 8:7-9:28). The old covenant of Moses could not effectively resolve the sin issue. It could only reveal the sin issue while also pointing toward a better covenant to come. The old covenant could not bring salvation; it could only anticipate what God intended to do in Christ. Jesus did for us what the priests of the old covenant could not do. In the new covenant, God invites us into relationship with Him by effectively dealing with our sin problem.



What are some ways Jesus' priesthood is better than the priesthood under the Mosaic Law?

Point 3: Jesus is the better sacrifice (Heb. 10:11-18).

¹¹ Every priest stands day after day ministering and offering the same sacrifices time after time, which can never take away sins. ¹² But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. ¹³ He is now waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified. ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. For after he says:

¹⁶ This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, the Lord says, I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds, ¹⁷ and I will never again remember their sins and their lawless acts.

¹⁸ Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

Again the writer compares Jesus with the old system, this time with a focus on Jesus as the **sacrifice**. The priests in the old covenant were required to offer the same kinds of sacrifices regularly, for the animal sacrifices they offered could not take away sins because an animal cannot rightly take the place of a single human being, much less all of humanity (Heb. 10:4). But Jesus, the better priest, offered the sacrifice that settled the sin issue—Himself. Having offered the once-for-all sacrifice, He then sat down, the sign of His completed work for our atonement.

Voices from the Church

“Since sin entered through a man, it had to be removed by a man. But no sinful man could be the sacrifice. Only Jesus could be the sinless substitute for us, dying the death we deserved and giving us His righteousness in exchange.”¹

—Mary Wiley

 What are some ways we can wrongly try to atone for our sin?

Sacrifices in the old covenant reminded people of the reality of their sin, but God has now chosen to remember our sin no more. God in mercy chooses not to hold our sin against us because Jesus has already paid the price for our wrong. The assurance of our salvation is thus based on what God has done on our behalf. And because of Jesus’ obedience and atonement for us, He will be rewarded: His enemies will be dealt with, and the people He has saved will be perfected forevermore.

 How does the Old Testament help us understand the significance of Jesus’ sacrificial death?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Hebrews 1–2

Some years ago, the television show *Touched by an Angel* was quite popular. The show featured an angel in human form who visited people and offered them hope, healing, and other blessings and lessons. Its popularity evidenced our craving for hope in a hurting world, but it also reflected our fascination with heavenly messengers. The topic of angels who influence our lives often draws people into the conversation.

If only we were equally—in fact, more—fascinated with Jesus! Using multiple Old Testament passages, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is superior to the angels. He is God’s Son, the Messiah whom the angels worship. Angels minister to believers, but they cannot compare to the One who sits at the right hand of God. Jesus lowered Himself to die in our place, but He also was crowned with glory and honor in His resurrection. He is the magnificent Creator who graciously helps us in temptation.

Because of who Jesus is, we must heed and obey what God has taught us through His Word. Drifting from the gospel should not be an option for believers.

Voices from the Church

“Jesus is a superior revelation of God. When we see him, we know just what the God of the universe is like. We know how he thinks. We know how he talks. We know how he relates to people. God has spoken in His Son. It is his ultimate communication, his final word, his consummate eloquence. Oh, the superiority of the Son!”³

—R. Kent Hughes



What are some things that compete with Jesus for your interest and affection?

Day 2: Read Hebrews 3–4

When you think of Moses, what comes to mind? A burning bush? The Red Sea? A mountaintop experience with God? Moses was generally faithful in God's work. He was a servant of God, but Jesus is the Son of God!

The Hebrews failed to follow God fully in Moses' day, and they missed entering the promised land because of their disobedience. They exemplified how not to follow God. We as believers in Christ are to be different. We are to strive for the rest that God offers. By faith and obedience, we should enjoy the peace of a right relationship with God in the present even as we look forward to heaven's rest in the future.

In the meantime, we trust the heart-piercing Word of God and draw near to the Son of God, our high priest who has defeated every type of temptation we face.



Why is it essential to understand that through Jesus, God has provided sufficient grace for us to persevere until the end?

Day 3: Read Hebrews 5–6

Jesus is the perfect high priest. Unlike the priests of the old covenant, who were required to offer sacrifices for their own sin, Jesus could die as the sinless sacrifice to offer eternal salvation to all who believe in Him. He was a priest after the order of Melchizedek, meaning a priesthood that preceded the old covenant and would be coupled with kingship as well (see Gen. 14:17-24; Ps. 110). Jesus fully obeyed the Father's will, even with gripping prayers, drenching tears, and agonizing pain in His death.

How readily we should praise our Savior! Regrettably, though, too often we are like the readers of Hebrews who had become too lazy to understand the teachings about Jesus (Heb. 5:11). When they should have been mature enough to be teachers, they were still only ready for the milk of God's Word rather than its meat.

The writer of Hebrews then warns the readers to make sure they give evidence of a genuine conversion in Christ. Religious ritual is not enough. We must persevere in God's grace, clinging to Jesus as our anchor and trusting Him as our high priest.



Why should we see spiritual growth not as an option but as an inevitability for those who possess saving faith in Christ?

Day 4: Read Hebrews 7–9

Whereas Hebrews 5 introduces Melchizedek, Hebrews 7 tells more of his story. He was both a king and a priest, just as Jesus is—a pairing that could not occur under the old covenant. Melchizedek blessed Abram with bread and wine (Gen. 14:17-24). In the ancient world, the greater person gave blessings to the lesser one; hence, Melchizedek was greater than even Abram, later Abraham. He was greater than Levi's line too, since Levi was a descendant of Abraham. Jesus, though, is greater than all.

The point of this discussion is to show that the old system has always pointed to something greater still to come. The One who is better is the perfect Son of God, holy and undefiled, the high priest forever. Where the law could not save, Jesus can and does. In His grace, God changes us internally by writing His words on our hearts and our minds.



Why is it important to keep God's faithfulness fresh in our minds as we consider our place in the story of creation and history?

Day 5: Read Hebrews 10

Followers of Christ have the privilege of coming to God's throne because Jesus, our high priest, shed His blood on our behalf. But we might take that truth for granted and fail to recognize its wonder. The old covenant system was only a shadow of what was still to come. Now, because the Son of God took on flesh and died for us, God welcomes us into His presence.

As believers, we are to draw near to God, hold onto our confession of faith, and provoke each other to love and good deeds. At the same time, each of us must examine his or her own heart. Those who have heard the truth but continue to sin deliberately give evidence that they have never truly trusted Christ. Those who truly follow Christ will endure even in times of persecution. They will persevere with an eye to their eternal future, and their confidence in Christ ultimately will not waver.



What are some ways we can intervene in order to steer a professing Christian away from deliberate sin?

